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I'd like to begin by thanking Chandni ben for her very kind and generous words, I do not know that I really deserve her kindness and her praise, I say so because being here is a very humbling and very inspiring experience. What I just heard from what Lucy and Martha Ben said is so engrossing, it just plunges you into the middle of the kind of work that homebased workers have been doing and their challenges. So, it's a great opportunity for me and at the outset I would thank HomeNet south Asia and WIEGO for organizing this and for considering me fit to come and speak to you, it's a real privilege in all, and I say this from the bottom of my heart.

I am delighted to see the heads of SABAH of South Asia nations present here along with such a large representative group of women workers. This is a historic occasion where the homebased workers from the continents are represented here at the first of its kind , and I must say that one of the most rewarding things about my tenure as SAARC – SG was the rare opportunity to be associated with SEWA and HomeNet South Asia(HNSA) in pursuing a project in south Asia for homebased workers and I deeply cherish that association . May I also add my words of welcome to the homebased workers not only from south Asia but from the world at large, and the organizations that have made it possible.

Beneath the riches and splendor of the globalization hype, their lies vast deprivation spread over nations and peoples whose basic needs aspirations and challenges are the same. In my talk today, I'd like to begin with South Asia, the role of women in peace building and in particular importance in the context of bringing together the women workers who belong to the marginalized and the most impoverished even though they may be veritable repository of incredible talents and art heritage coming down from generations.

The South Asian region today, seen from the top, looks at crossroads, one way from here goes towards greater regional cooperation engagements and growing together as the other regions in the world have done, and the other is to remain trapped and injured in the distrust rivalry and inertia of a zero some gain with the politicians practice. So many sectors point to the wisdom of the former and the dreary bareness of the latter. Women in all countries in South Asia, are crucial stakeholders on this road towards peace and prosperity. As the noble Laurent Mohammed Younas said "Women worry and care about livelihood, family and children, while men often think of only enjoying."

As statistics compiled by various international organizations indicate the overall status about the women countries of south Asia are hopefully poor, infact for some areas, the statistics shows South Asia in regards to literacy, life expectancy, employment, crime against women, as being the worst in the world. Half of the South Asian women cannot read, it is here that I draw great inspirations from the work of SEWA in this regard and the devotion and the leadership of Elaben, permit me to quote from her essay which I read recently "To reflect the essence of commitment" and I quote- "Our goal is the well being of the poor women, their families, their work, their community, and the world we all live in". Gandhiji said that freedom is not given, it is generated within oneself. My experience is that women's work is that guarantee of freedom, coming from within.

The SAARC social charter talked about in 2004, the millennium development goals and adopted them for SAARC region as SAARC development goals, which include respect given to women in South Asia as a major factor for peace. The vision of peace, stability and prosperity is far more reaching and deeper than mere absence of conflict. Alongside, the top down approach of official summits, and high level diplomatic engagements, peace building and guarantying stability in South Asia, warrants that member states in the region also adopt a bottoms-up vision to grow together in co-operation build bridges of engagement for mutual benefit and harness their commonality at the very grassroots.

The region's growth is also critically dependent on fuller engagement and development of women and women's economic development, literacy, health, equal rights, weather we are men under law and protection from crime are essential for social stability. Actually, their education and empowerment where ever it has happened in the pockets areas, they have made a difference, for instance, in the state of Kerala in India, in Sri Lanka and ongoing parts of central and eastern Bangladesh. Women in general have shown greater capability to reach out in compassion and empathy. The species in South Asia is tied to women's empowerment and the attainment of SAARC development goals.

The project in South Asia through SAARC Development Fund which Renana ben mentioned and Chandni ji also mentioned was started in 2008 and it is actually going on, and she rightly mentioned it's a flagship project of the SAARC Development Fund. The objectives of the project are to build a strong supply chain and to generate employment at each stage of the supply chain along with building up of a social business organization in each member state, and to make it sustainable and capable of further expansion, so as to generate and increase employment. It also aimed at strengthening marketing power through collective marketing and branding effort. The overall impact is expected to promote development and inclusive growth through sharing experiences and learning from each other's successes and building a model of empowerment of women through crafts making and marketing to be replicated afterwards in other sectors. This would deepen the relationship among the SAARC members based on learning and sharing, and I have already heard about SABAH which is created for this purpose. It was felt in the beginning that SABAH should focus on particular products; the Pakistan Homebased workers were highly skilled in the embroidery including "Fulkari". SABAH Pakistan began focusing on developing textile based embroidery intensive products. In Nepal, natural fibers occupied a large number of homebased workers, so SABAH Nepal focused on natural fibers and weaving based products. In Sri Lanka, SABAH Sri Lanka would promote food processing and spice based products. SABAH Bangladesh has concentrated on textiles, weaving and katha embroidery. This SABAH project is a unique one, it has a unique mission based on the concept of sharing and collaborating. It has encouraged homebased workers across the member stage to closely interact with their counterparts. So it is not difficult even to think about building a common name made in SAARC brand with the product tags proudly stating by this line.

I have spent lot of years in diplomacy and trying to connect at that level and still by heart I always felt that engagement is better than alienation, but when we deal with South Asia, we have to deal with this mount of problems and alienations at the top. But I must say that my experience with SEWA's project, HNSA and SABAH enabled me to have still in touch with the women from South

Asia, the Homebased workers and I can tell you without exaggeration and sincerity, that meeting them was a real uplifting.

We had organized 16th SAARC summit in Bhutan and 1st exhibition of SABAH products and there were these women, who came from different areas and were displaying their wares and had extraordinary skills and art. So when the governments were taken into their exhibition hall, they were stunned by the quality of their output and still the simplicity. The Pakistan Prime Minister Mr. Gelani then asked the lady from Pakistan in Urdu “Kaha bana hai” – “where is it made?” She said in utter sincerity and innocence “SAARC mein bana hai”– “it’s made in SAARC” now that kind of spontaneous connection and engagement it comes so easily to these women.

I have seen in Nepal, they took me to a place where they were working, women came from far flung areas in Nepal from where traffic and transport is not easy, and a lady was working on that very special grass and her baby was sitting next to her on a little pram, and when I asked her, how she was? She said I am alright, I am happy, I have my child here. So their joy’s are so simple and still they connect to us, from the bottom and they deliver something which we cannot do. So, I am full with that kind of a feeling because I find that in this kind of association which you are building, these homebased workers, the emotional intelligence which multinationals and management people talk about, actually reaches its culmination and completeness.

In the presentation by Martha ben just now, which described the challenges, aspects of the work, and how they are struggling at every stage. It shows that despite these things, work is continuing and you are able to overcome. So I just wanted to emphasize this aspect and in most communities in South Asia, again as Martha ben said women tend to be restricted in their homes, restricted in their movements and restricted in their opportunities. When they join an organization, it opens their energies, creates opportunities and empowerment. Although the restrictions continue, they begin to build up support leading the changes in their families and their communities.

As the poet – W.H.ARDEN said about the grandmasters, I say it applied to women – “THAT ABOUT SUFFERING, THEY ARE NEVER WRONG”. Bringing poor women from different countries together in recent years for a wide range of purposes also shows that women come together very naturally. In spite of the tensions that exists between their countries, and I will give you an example: a woman worker in the Sakhar district in Pakistan noted, at an initial skill training programme hosted by HNSA and SEWA and I quote: “ one woman from my village came to my home and told my husband how can you allow her to go? It would be the 1st time from anyone in this village will be going out of this country and that too in India?? You know the situation there? But before I could answer, my son said, “someone has to be the first, and I am proud it is my mother”. Now this simple narrative from a person, who came from the Sakhar to Ahmedabad to learn this initial training thing, shows the grit and the determination within SAARC as well as one of the key concern as to how to build cooperative ties across countries South Asia.

Today’s efforts towards the cross-countries integration under SAARC auspicious take place on multiple levels, government to government, business associations, professional associations, journalists, doctors and lawyers, cultural exchanges, music, films dance and through many other types of exchanges, often involving elite groups, however, the types of interaction that takes place through organizations like the HomeNet South Asia, SEWA and SABAH involves those who are near the bottom of the social and economical ladder, which makes such exchanges and alliances of

SAARC countries of common people, particularly important. And after hearing Lucy, I find what she was talking is exactly what we feel in South Asia, so there is this bond and commonality across the countries, and it provides, as yet said, the rags and bone shop of the heart, where all ladders start. The friendship and alliances that we are going to produce in the coming days, with the deeper and wider effects, far outlay any diplomatic efforts of building bridges. So, I am very confident that in these two coming days that you have agreed to get together this will be very useful and fruitful exercise and I have no doubt that in these days sharing of experiences and learning from each other will transcend the immediate reason and reach out in a wider world, for greater mutual benefits, so be it

Thank you..